

News Items and Public Crime Summary for Week Ending January 29, 2011

Dutch Caribbean – U.S. and Dutch Concerned About USFOL in 2010

The U.S. and Dutch governments shared concerns about the U.S. Forward Operating Location (USFOL) future in January 2010, just prior to elections in the Dutch Caribbean, according to Wikileaks reports. Venezuelan influence and a negative stance towards the USFOL by opposition parties had caused U.S. and Dutch concern.

Important U.S. interests could be affected by Venezuelan meddling and possible changes in status and government in the former Netherlands Antilles, a U.S. Embassy The Hague cable reportedly stated.

The Dutch government requested U.S. written confirmation that the USFOL is not used to spy on Venezuela, after Venezuelan President Chavez repeatedly accused the U.S. of airspace violations. The Dutch government accepted an oral confirmation by U.S. Ambassador to the Netherlands Fay Hartog-Levin that the U.S. only carries out surveillance flights to detect and monitor illegal drug trafficking which is in full compliance with the USFOL agreement.

The Dutch are not concerned about a possible Venezuelan invasion of the Dutch Caribbean Islands, but believe that Chavez could cause economic havoc by meddling and quarreling in the region, according to reports in 2005. (Various media)

Curacao – Venezuelan Company Wants Submarine Cabling Contract

The Curacao Government has received a request by Telecomunicaciones Gran Caribe S.A. Venezuela to lay and maintain a submarine fiber-optic cable in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of Curacao which would be used for the supply of transmission services to various telecommunications operators.

An official request by the Venezuelan Company is necessary because EEZ territorial waters are extensions of a state's laws and right of defense and rights to resources offshore. The boundaries of an EEZ go well beyond territorial waters, extending 200 miles (322 km) from shore. The government informed the public via a newspaper ad that it has the request under consideration. (Amigoe)

Curacao - National Security Director Back at Work

Curacao National Security Administration (VDC) director Edsel Gumbs who was suspended early November 2010 by PM Gerrit Schotte for reportedly leaking information to opposition party PAR and who won a court case against the government is still at work, despite complaints by PM Schotte about irresolvable differences and a lack of trust in Gumbs. (Antilliaans Dagblad)

Statia - Caribbean Touts Tourism Surge Not Seen Since '08

The Caribbean is attracting tourists in numbers not seen since the start of the global economic crisis, with several islands boasting new records, Caribbean government officials said Friday. More than 23 million tourists visited the region in 2010, a nearly 5

percent increase from the 22.1 million that visited the previous year, according to the Caribbean Tourism Organization. St. Eustatius, a speck of an island that was previously part of the Netherlands Antilles, got a big boost from European visitors. (Antilles Post)

Aruba – Aruban Rattlesnakes on Endangered Species List

The Arizona-based Phoenix Herpetological Society recently received three Aruba Island rattlesnakes, considered to be among the most endangered rattlesnakes in the world. The facility had to obtain a permit under the Endangered Species Act to house the snakes, and is one of a small number of zoos in the United States to be granted permission to obtain these snakes.

The Aruba Island rattlesnake is threatened due to loss of habitat and food sources on Aruba, where development and tree-cutting for charcoal and firewood have contributed to the demise of the rattlesnake. Illegal exportation for the pet trade has also taken a toll on the snake's population in the wild. (Aruba Post)

Bonaire - Scuba Diving Magazine: Bonaire Top Dive Destination

Winter Park, FL-based Scuba Diving Magazine readers have granted Bonaire with top honors. The popular scuba diving destination received four #1 Ratings, which is more than any other destination in the Caribbean/Atlantic category. This year is the ninth consecutive year Bonaire has taken first place for Top Overall Diving in Scuba Diving magazine's Readers' Choice Awards.

Bonaire received first place in three other Caribbean/Atlantic categories: Top Health of Marine Environment, Top Macro Life and Top Shore Diving, and also received second place in seven other Caribbean/Atlantic categories: Overall Destination, Value for Diving Dollar, Beginner Diving, Snorkeling, Visibility, Marine Life and Underwater Photography. (Various media)

Curacao – Venezuelan Tourism Decline Continues; U.S. Market Up

The Curacao Tourism Bureau (CTB) reported a 7% tourism decline in 2010 compared to 2009. The tourism decline from Venezuela in 2010 is extremely worrisome (40,000 tourists max.), because Venezuela contributes to a significant part of the entire tourism market from South America. However, part of the decline can be contributed to a dollar-tourism influx in 2007-2009 when Curacao was crowded with Venezuelans, many fleeing their country's spiraling inflation and currency controls. Stringent currency legislation imposed by Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez aimed at stemming capital flight caused a Venezuelan tourism market collapse. 2006 was the last 'normal' year with 24,000 tourists from Venezuela, a CTB spokesperson said. The North American market increased by 40% in 2010 compared to 2009. (Antilliaans Dagblad)

Curacao\St. Maarten – Finance Ministers Discuss Dollarization

Curacao Finance Minister Jorge Jamaloodin and St. Maarten Finance Minister Hiro Shigemota discussed the possibility of dollarization last week. Shigemota said in a press release he explained to Jamaloodin that St. Maarten has not decided anything pertaining to dollarization as it is still in the process of gathering and exchanging information, and listening to stakeholders. (Daily Herald)

Curacao - Smarter Travel: Curacao a Destination to Watch in 2011

Boston, MA-based Smarter Travel Media LLC has placed Curacao on its 2011 destinations to watch list. It's not every day the world gets a new country. But 2011 will mark Curacao's first full year as an autonomous entity within the Kingdom of the Netherlands, adding a new chapter to the island's rich history. Among its first order of business is making itself more accessible to Americans and Canadians. So be on the lookout for more flights and hotel rooms that will put the island's warm waters and colorful architecture a little closer to visitors in need of a dose of upscale Caribbean relaxation, a press release stated. (Various media)

Curacao – Counterfeit Goods From Curacao Cause Problems in U.S.

Jamaicans who travel to the United States to source goods for resale are being warned to steer clear of counterfeits or face criminal sanctions and denial of re-entry to the U.S. Counterfeit vendors are in every major commercial capital and a huge problem. In Jamaica the majority of counterfeit goods are coming from China and the Curacao Free Trade Zone. Fake drugs (medicines), batteries, car parts, even Jamaican cigarettes are important, according to the Jamaican Observer newspaper. Curacao does not have a brand registration system so they can sell brands like Nautica, Tommy Hilfiger and so on without a problem, according to the media report. The Jamaican Government warning to avoid purchasing counterfeit goods from Curacao is a blow to the Curacao Free Trade Zone and its vendors that rely on Jamaican buyers. (La Prensa)

Curacao – Maritime Authorities Fail to Comply by Safety and Security Standards

14 Caribbean countries have signed the Caribbean Memorandum of Understanding on Port State Control (CMOU) which is active since 1996. The CMOU regime strives to maintain a watchful eye throughout the Caribbean region to ensure that shipping is conducted in a safe, secure and environmentally friendly manner. CMOU goals are eliminating the operation of sub-standard ships in the region through a harmonized system of port state control and to assist in securing the compliance of ships with international conventions/standards regarding: safety of life at sea; security; prevention of marine pollution; and working and living conditions on board ships. The Curacao Maritime Authority Directorate has failed to comply by some CMOU rules and regulations, according to the CMOU 2009 Annual Report. The islands of the former Netherlands Antilles recorded the highest number of deficiencies with 249 and reportedly slipped from a "white list" to a "grey list" ranking. The 3rd Annual Port State Control Seminar will be held from February 1 - 3, 2011 in Freeport, Bahamas. Presenters from Lloyd's Register North America, DNV and the Netherlands Shipping Inspectorate will be going through case studies with participants. Also, the United States Coast Guard supports and assists the region in terms of training attachments for Port State Inspections and other training initiatives. (Various media)

Curacao - Dutch Caribbean Securities Exchange Celebrates Inauguration

UK-based Trayport, a leading provider of exchange trading systems worldwide announced that its client, the Dutch Caribbean Securities Exchange (DCSX) (www.dcsx.an), has gone fully operational on January 20, 2011, and is expecting its first listings this quarter.

Financial institutions including Banco di Caribe, Amicorp, SFT Bank, BNH Financial Services and Maduro & Curriel's Bank are now authorized by DCSX as brokers. "DCSX will primarily provide an exchange for the trading of equities, fixed income and funds," said Luis Santine, CEO of DCSX. "We expect a significant amount of fund listing in particular, as there is a demand for local alternative investment opportunities that have arisen from the constitutional change from the former Netherlands Antilles in 2010. The government is only permitted to issue bonds freely, only after approval has been gained, which can be a limiting factor for pension funds and insurance companies. So, the exchange will be a way of creating alternative investment for them. Many small to medium size firms are also likely to list on DCSX as it provides a cost effective alternative to listing in the Netherlands itself." (Various media)

ABC Islands – Tourism Cooperation is Key to Increase Market Share

Aruba Tourism Minister Otmar Oduber, his Curaçao counterpart Nasser El Hakim, and Bonaire Commissioner Elvis Tjon Asjoe met in Aruba to discuss areas of common tourism interest. The dignitaries agreed to search for ways to increase cooperation, and improve air traffic service, including an airport departure fee reduction for inter-island flights. They want to combine efforts to further develop the cruise sector at a Sea Trade congress in March. Also, they agreed to study the possibilities for joint marketing and promotion funding of, in particular, new markets. (Various media)

Aruba - Valero Energy Corporation Reports 2010 Annual Results

San Antonio-based Valero Energy Corporation reported, for the year ended December 31, 2010, income from continuing operations of \$923 million, compared to a full-year 2009 loss from continuing operations of \$273 million.

"What a difference a year makes," said Valero Chairman and CEO Bill Klesse. "The global economic recovery is underway with very strong growth in developing countries contributing to a surge in global demand for oil and refined products. Refining margins and crude oil discounts have improved substantially over the past year, and this market momentum has carried into 2011. Global demand growth should continue to support refining margins and encourage exports from competitive refiners like Valero which was one of the reasons for Valero to re-open its Aruba-operated plant in December 2010. Purchased in 2004 by Valero, the Aruba Refinery has been through significant upgrades since it was re-commissioned in the early 1990s. The Aruba refinery processes lower-cost heavy sour crude oil and produces a high yield of finished distillate products and valuable intermediate feedstocks that can be marketed in the U.S. Gulf Coast, Florida, the New York Harbor, the Caribbean, South America and Europe. The refinery has a total throughput capacity of 235,000 barrels per day (BPD) and employs approximately 780 individuals. (Aruba Post)

Aruba - AirTran Airways Expands Service to Aruba

Orlando-based AirTran Airways, a subsidiary of AirTran Holdings, Inc. announced the continued expansion of its burgeoning Caribbean flight schedule while unveiling its seasonal travel schedule. The Caribbean expansion includes daily service to Aruba. Nonstop flights between Atlanta and Aruba will be available beginning March 7, 2011. (Amigoe)

Curacao – Prison Raid Netted Various Illegal Items

Police and other law enforcements agencies raided the Curacao prison netting 24 cell phones, chargers, various types of weapons, and narcotics. The investigation is ongoing, a police spokesperson said. (Various media)

Aruba – Residences Raided in Drugs and Money-Laundering Probe

Various residences and businesses in Aruba, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Spain were raided by law enforcement officials in an ongoing international investigation into money-laundering and international drug paraphernalia trafficking this week. The Dutch Public Prosecutor's Office is coordinating the Roma case investigation which started in September 2009. Four arrests were made, but none in Aruba. (Various media)

Curacao/St. Maarten – Financial Sector Criticizes Dollarization Idea

Central Bank of Curaçao and St. Maarten (CBCS) Director Emsley Tromp recently suggested a “transfer compensation” to counterbalance revenue loss if dollarization materializes in the two new semi-autonomous Dutch Kingdom entities. Financial services sector spokespersons question the introduction of a new compensation fee if one of the reasons for dollarization is abolishing “seigniorage fee” and the 1% foreign exchange license fee for U.S. dollar transactions.

The dollarization discussion has heated up again. St. Maarten is considering several options, including leave the monetary union with Curaçao, instead of introducing a new joint Caribbean guilder. The current Curaçao government is now also considering dollarization. However, within the local banking sector, many are still of the opinion that the advantages of dollarization do not outweigh the disadvantages. (Various media)

Aruba - Island Birds + Invading Boa = Trouble in Paradise

The NY Times opinion page featured a blog by Peter Fong, a writer, editor, and flyfishing guide, yesterday. For thousands of years, human mobility has brought all manner of species to isolated islands and regions, with the result being powerfully disrupted ecosystems.

Snakes have been particularly damaging. Boas were introduced to Aruba as early as 1999, probably by irresponsible pet owners. Estimates for the current population on the 74-square-mile island (slightly smaller than Brooklyn, NY) range from 2,000 to 8,000, so these first efforts will hardly change the dynamics of the invasion. Fong has tracked Dot Earth coverage of travails related to various invasive species after tagging along recently with the Boa Constrictor Task Force in Aruba.

Aruba's native mockingbirds, owls and orioles have met the enemy, and it swallows them whole. According to Aruba Birdlife Conservation, boa constrictors kill more than 17,000 island birds per year.

Professor Howard Reinert of the College of New Jersey, who has studied Aruba's snakes since 1985, argues that "Aruba would have a lot more birds, lizards, rabbits, bats, and cascabels if everyone would hunt and kill goats instead of boas." Introduced by Spanish conquistadors during Aruba's colonial period, goats and donkeys have disrupted the island's ecosystem for so long that biologists can only guess what the landscape would look like without them. With any luck, a public motivated to control boa populations will extend that concern to the bedrock of all healthy wildlife populations: habitat. <http://dotearth.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/01/27/island-birds-invading-boa-trouble-in-paradise/> (Aruba Post)

CURAÇAO

Crime January 21 – 27

On January 22, a tourist couple near Watamula was robbed by two men. The male victim was beaten. On January 24, a couple at the Marie Pompoen pier was shortly abducted by two men. They were forced to withdraw money from various ATMs. The female victim was subsequently raped and the couple was later left behind near Bapor Kibrá. The following day, a Chinese grocery store in Monchi was robbed at closing time by two men. On January 26, a lottery ticket-selling business in Juan Hato was robbed. The same evening, a young man in Koraal Specht was shot and injured during a drive-by shooting (Amigoe, Extra, Antilliaans Dagblad).

ARUBA

Crime January 21 – 27

On January 24, a lottery ticket-selling business was robbed in Oranjestad (Diario Aruba).

ST. MAARTEN

Crime January 21 – 27

On January 21, a suspect attempted to rob a female home owner in Mary's Fancy. The victim was shot and injured during a struggle, after which the suspect fled the scene. The following day, a pedestrian in Sucker Garden was robbed (Daily Herald).

"The Weekly Press Summary is a compilation of stories running in the Dutch Caribbean press that is intended to alert readers about items of interest to them. There is no interpretation or verification of the facts contained therein."